

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 155

By Burks

A RESOLUTION to honor and recognize the Cumberland County Playhouse on its fortieth anniversary.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that members of this General Assembly should pause to specially recognize those estimable institutions that bring the joys of artistic expression and culture to the citizens of this State; and

WHEREAS, the Cumberland County Playhouse (CCP), which celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2005, is one such worthy institution that has made a substantial contribution to the cultural fabric of this State; and

WHEREAS, what began as a summer vacation for Paul and Mary Crabtree and their children has grown into one of the top ten largest professional theaters in rural America. With the support of the Cumberland County community, the Crabtrees founded this nationally recognized regional theater in Crossville, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, the Crabtrees decided on Crossville because of Mary's deep family roots in this rural town: her great-grandfather, Samuel Cline, was one of the founders of the city of Crossville and her grandfather, S.C. Bishop, established the *Crossville Chronicle* newspaper. In establishing the CCP, Mary Crabtree has created a lasting legacy in Crossville that will be remembered and appreciated by future generations; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to the theater business, Paul Crabtree read for and was hired by the legendary Rodgers and Hammerstein in a Broadway production of *Oklahoma*. His talents as a writer and director were highly sought after in Hollywood before he decided to make a family affair out of the Cumberland County Playhouse; and

WHEREAS, in order to raise the money needed to build the 500-seat theater, they sold stock for ten dollars a share; after raising \$100,000, the Crabtrees opened the red barn wood theater for its first performance in 1965; and

WHEREAS, the Playhouse has long been a family affair, with Paul writing, composing, and directing while Mary managed the finances and hired the actors and the Crabtree's seven children played roles in front of, behind, and on the stage; and

WHEREAS, even with the Crabtree family's vision and talent, there existed a need for a core group of leaders whose role was to garner support for the Playhouse from within the community. The members of the original Board of Directors of CCP, Bette Evans, Carl Sutton, C.C. Simonton, J.W. Brown, "Shadow" Davenport, Paul Crabtree, and Margaret Keyes Harrison provided a strong foundation from which the theater could flourish; and

WHEREAS, due to a lack of funds, the first production staged by the CCP was a play written by Paul Crabtree entitled *Tennessee USA*, a musical comedy cavalcade of state history. This play received a great deal of praise and initiated an extraordinary production lineup over the years which has included such greats as *Steel Magnolias*, *Cinderella*, *Christy*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Smoke on the Mountain*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Singing in the Rain*, *The Tempest*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Annie*, *Cats*, and *Beauty and the Beast*; and

WHEREAS, the CCP flourished as a result of the dedication of the Crabtree family and the numerous volunteers, who work with everything from scene design and construction to designing and sewing costumes; and

WHEREAS, in 1971 the Playhouse became the only rurally-based organization in Tennessee designated by the Tennessee Arts Commission as a Major Cultural Institution; it retains this remarkable status today; and

WHEREAS, after Paul's sudden passing in 1979, the Crabtree family knew that the show must go on and so pulled together to keep the Playhouse going; and

WHEREAS, Jim Crabtree returned to the theater in 1976 after graduating from Yale School of Drama and is currently serving as Technical Director of the CCP. Jim says of the CCP, "Our nickname, 'Tennessee's Family Theatre', has to do with the families who nurtured it

into one of America's largest and most respected self-sufficient, non-profit, professional performing arts organizations in the nation."; and

WHEREAS, Jim's wife, Annie, serves as Resident Musical Director and, even though she retired as the Playhouse's Producing Director, Mary Crabtree still takes an active interest in the happenings of the Playhouse; and

WHEREAS, the CCP has blossomed from its original 500-seat theater and box office to a much more elaborate structure that boasts an additional 300-seat theater, a green room, two dance studios, full costume and scenic construction shops, a paint studio, and two rehearsal halls; and

WHEREAS, the CCP celebrates the culture of rural America and brings to the audience many of the works which have come to represent America. The current impressive CCP season is representative of this mission and includes serving more than 180,000 patrons with 450 performances of a dozen plays and musicals, 1,700 classes, and fifteen concerts. Just a few of the performances this season include a student edition of *Les Miserables* and big name productions such as *Big River*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Cats*, *A Sanders Family Christmas*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and *Smoke on the Mountain*; and

WHEREAS, the CCP's leadership has put into place numerous resources to broaden the horizons of its patrons and to provide a new and inspiring experience with each visit; and

WHEREAS, the CCP has been warmly welcomed by a thankful community which has been entertained and enlightened time and again by the theater; and

WHEREAS, the Cumberland County Playhouse has inspired applause from the arts community of our nation and has brought honor to the State of Tennessee; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we hereby join with the administration, staff, and volunteers of the Cumberland County Playhouse, the Crabtree family, and the citizens of Tennessee in celebrating the Playhouse's invaluable contributions to our State and its cultural landscape for the past forty years, thank the good people associated with the Playhouse for their service to

Tennessee, wish them every future success in their cultural endeavors, and offer our hopes for many more years of quality dramatic productions from the heart of Cumberland County.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.